Chapter 4
Connecting Best Practices for Teaching International Students With Student Satisfaction:
A Review of STEM and Non-STEM Student Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores promising teaching practices for teaching linguistically and culturally diverse international students by identifying the teaching practices that have high levels of international student satisfaction and student perceptions of learning for science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM)

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and non-STEM international students. Research was conducted by an international, student-learning community, with guidance from a faculty-led research team. Data was collected through a qualitative research design that included focus groups and individual interviews conducted at a mid-sized Canadian comprehensive university. A total of 28 students participated (14 STEM students and 14 non-STEM students). Researchers examined differences between STEM and non-STEM students on 22 promising teaching practices regarding student satisfaction and students' perceptions of learning. Recommendations for professional practice are discussed, along with potential areas for further research.

BACKGROUND

As international student enrollment in Canadian and U.S. colleges and universities grows, institutions are becoming increasingly more culturally and ethnoculturally diverse (Canadian Bureau of International Education, 2016; Institute of International Education, 2016). Despite this trend, few instructors have received training for teaching international students (Paige & Goode, 2009), which may produce an inadequate environment for intercultural learning. In order to achieve higher student satisfaction and perceptions of learning, instructors need to implement new teaching strategies that may better engage international students. Educational leaders also need to analyze their role in facilitating students' learning experiences abroad.

Culture shock may be the first big discomfort faced by international students when they arrive in the new host country; even so, this will not be the only challenge they face. As soon as they move abroad to study, international students must adapt to new social and academic environments. Beyond living arrangements, socialization, language barriers, changes in eating practices, and in communication, international students also must face issues regarding their academic life. They will not only deal with new methods of teaching used by their instructors, in a foreign language, but they will also have to alter their learning strategies and preferences to a new learning environment (Lin & Yi, 1997; Rao, 2017; Smith, Zhou, Potter, & Wang, 2019).

Smith, Zhou, Potter, and Wang (2019) identified some of the teaching practices that have high levels of student satisfaction and perceptions of learning. They found that instructors who use these teaching practices will create a more accessible learning environment for international students. In a subsequent research report (Smith, Zhou, Potter, Wang, Pecoraro, & Paulino, 2019), they found that by examining individual student characteristics (e.g., country of origin, the field of study, level of study), the preferred teaching practices, rated by the respondents, varied significantly. In addition, they revealed 22 promising teaching practices where there was a significant difference between the responses of STEM and non-STEM students regarding student satisfaction and perceptions of learning.

Although there are studies that confirm variability in student satisfaction and perceptions of learning by the students' field of study, the literature is deficient regarding investigating the experiences of international students. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the different teaching and learning preferences of international students, with specific attention to the differences between STEM and non-STEM students' preferences, to identify the most promising teaching practices for teaching linguistically and culturally diverse international students.

The following two research questions guided this study: